

Assess@Learning Newsletter

Empower students with digital formative assessment

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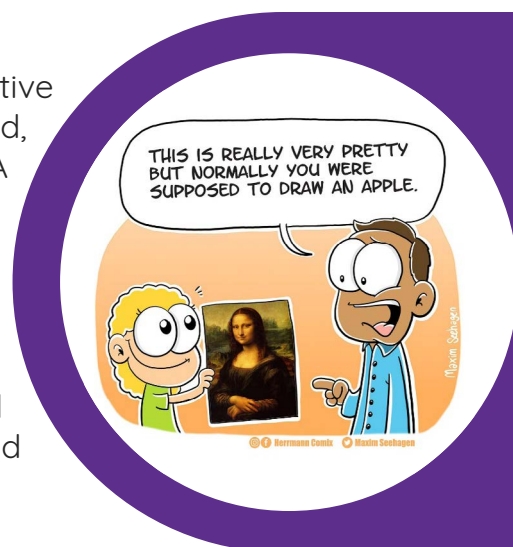
Welcome to the final issue of the Assess@Learning newsletter series! You can find all our previous newsletters and articles in the **News and Articles** page. The previous issues offer interesting ideas related to formative assessment: how is formative assessment addressed in different countries, how to design effective assessment questions, how to support formative assessment in schools as a leader, and many more.

Although formative assessment can empower both teachers and students, it is still not widely adopted by schools and when it is adopted, more support can be provided for its effective use. Furthermore, the potential of digital tools to support formative assessment has not been fully realised.

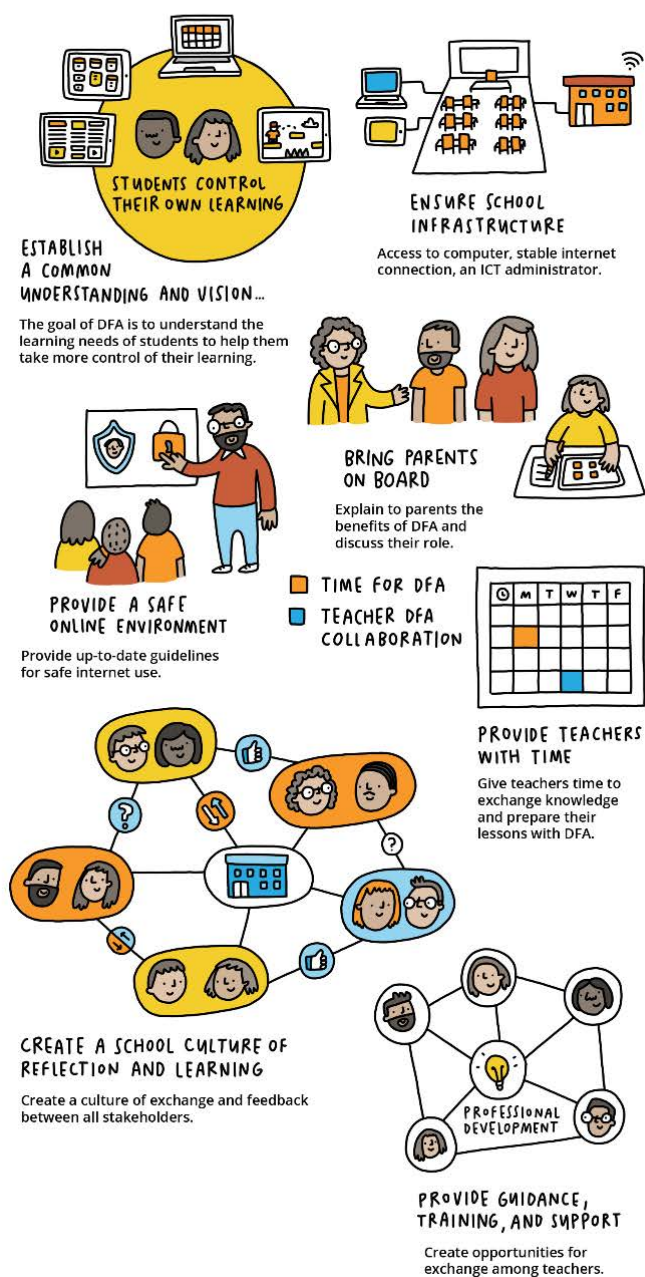
How can teachers effectively implement digital formative assessment (DFA) in their classroom? How can we support teachers in this process?

These are some of the questions which the Assess@Learning policy experimentation considered since its launch in 2019.

The project had a quantitative and a qualitative research strand. For the quantitative strand, the project developed an online systemic DFA toolkit. The toolkit offered ideas to inspire teachers to try DFA, and information to school leaders, students, policy makers and parents/guardians to make them aware of their role in supporting DFA. The project tested whether the toolkit had an impact on teachers', school leaders' and students' knowledge, attitude and practices regarding DFA.



HOW CAN I SUPPORT DFA IN MY SCHOOL?



In the qualitative strand, the project promoted dialogue and exchange on DFA between stakeholders in education through workshops called dialogue labs. In five countries, 25 dialogue labs took place. Ten of these were student dialogue labs, where exclusively students discussed and shared their views on DFA and learning and assessment in general. The dialogue labs enabled the project to explore the social impact of DFA on students and the views of education stakeholders concerning DFA in their own context.

You can find the report on the social impact on students and the report on the results of the experimentation in the [Project Outcomes](#) page. The project results from the toolkit testing and the dialogue labs were presented at a final conference composed of three webinars taking place on February 6th, 8th and 10th, 2023.

The A@L toolkit is now available as an open educational resource

The toolkit is now publicly available and can be visited at the [toolkit page](#). It is available in English, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Portuguese and Spanish. The toolkit is also available as an open educational resource (OER) package. You can download all the pages, infographics and files of the toolkit as a bundle. As long as you credit the original project, you can use this bundle to upload the toolkit on a website, for example, on a school website. If you have any feedback about the toolkit, we would be happy to hear them at: antoine.bilgin@eun.org

Future directions for DFA

Interview with Hermione Karagianni

What is the most interesting outcome of the A@L field trials for you?

According to the project's methodology, the A@L DFA Toolkit was offered to participant schools on a completely free and voluntary use basis; without any requirements nor any guidance on its use. Thus, school heads and teachers from the test group were free to explore the toolkit and use it with their students if and as they saw fit within their everyday practice.

Furthermore, an independent sample of typical public schools was randomly selected and no prerequisites concerning teachers' skills were posed, e.g., no digital pedagogy competences were required. In this research context, among the findings is that "teachers think very positively about DFA but did not use DFA a lot with their students".

At the same time, two statistically strong outcomes of the field trials are that the DFA toolkit had a clearly positive impact on teachers' knowledge regarding formative assessment, whereas it had no impact on school heads' awareness about assessment approaches and roles.

These findings might be pinpointing the need to raise awareness and ensure the appropriate mindset and conditions in schools, including time availability and enabling infrastructure, along with the need to provide teachers with training, guidance, and support on how to embed formative assessment in their teaching and how to exploit related digital tools. It is worth noting that these needs and the requirement to meet them on a policy level, emerged by the project's parallel qualitative research conducted through a series of 15 national dialogue labs and 10 student dialogue labs organised in the 5 partner countries from March 2021 until November 2022.

What can school leaders and policy makers do to encourage teachers to try DFA at school?

- » Recognise that time management is required both from teachers (planning, implementation, feedback, etc.) and students (construction of outputs, delivery deadlines, etc.), as well as the difficulties in managing and integrating digital resources in pedagogy and provide related training, incentives and support.
- » Ensure availability and continuous accessibility of appropriate technological infrastructure at school.



Hermione Karagianni currently works at the University of Patras and acts as the CTI's scientific coordinator for the Greek implementation of the European Policy Experimentation "Assess@Learning" in the field of digital formative assessment. Her interests focus on educational research and on the integration of digital innovation in everyday life and into the teaching-learning process. She has coordinated and participated in more than 20 European projects and studies in areas of innovative technologies and digital pedagogy, including three major European educational policy experimentations.

- » Provide teacher training on DFA.
- » Provide the pedagogical framework needed for a good DFA scenario design, dedicated didactical guidelines and appropriate tools.
- » Encourage teachers with digital literacy and theoretical knowledge of contemporary teaching approaches to share good practices with their colleagues.
- » Induct student's overall assessment in a descriptive manner, as the stress of summative assessment (numerical grading) and the related parents' culture often prevents teachers from focusing on DFA.
- » Facilitate the frequent exchange of opinions and good practices between the school's teachers, which can provide the context for cultivating the collective culture of DFA-based learning management in the school.
- » Organise the meetings of the school's teacher association in the form of dialogue labs, where experts can be invited, to co-develop the theoretical framework necessary to support DFA, co-design the integration of DFA activities in the everyday school practice, expand good practices and achieve a DFA mindset, understanding the benefits of FA, the shift of interest from teaching to learning, the value of enriching learning objectives with transversal skills etc.
- » Encourage teachers to find the margin to test DFA before they decide to exploit it in their lessons, in the framework of cross-curricular activities developed by the school where the notions of formative assessment and self-assessment, on personal and group level, can be prioritized without the students' stress of being graded.

What do you think future projects and research studies should investigate regarding DFA?

To what extent is (D)FA commonly perceived within the educational and school communities? Which are the issues where substantial knowledge, support and incentives should be provided to school heads, teachers, parents, and students, to attain and sustain a collective DFA culture? Which substantial knowledge and support should be provided to teachers to be able to effectively use DFA in their classrooms? Which are the practical limitations and how they can be lifted? Which are the crucial factors for the success of a DFA didactical intervention? These are some questions that future research can address.



Future directions for DFA

Interview with Janet Looney

How can digital tools support formative assessment in general?

While it's always important to point out that the effectiveness of DFA depends on teachers' general assessment competences, teachers need to plan opportunities to gather information about student learning, whether using digital tools or through personal interactions.

A few of advantages of digitally supported formative assessment include:

- » Rapid feedback and scaffolding of next steps for learning at an appropriate level of difficulty (online quizzes, educational games, etc.)
- » Classroom polling tools to check learner understanding in real-time
- » Online platforms that allow learners to collaborate on projects, and to assess and improve the work together.
- » Mobile tools to support assessment of 'anytime, anywhere' learning
- » Online platforms that set up complex ill-defined problems that challenge learners and support collective engagement in problem solving in small groups or in a massive multiplayer online environment. Peer-based formative assessment is embedded within the problem-solving process.
- » Access to resources and online exemplars to support individualized learning pathways.
- » Digital dashboards that track learner progress over time.
- » Collection (or 'mining') of educational data to better understand learning processes and contexts, and in turn, use these data to generate learning analytics to predict student progress and adapt learning.

How was your experience of conducting a literature review on digital formative assessment for the A@L project?

[The literature review](#) was both challenging and interesting. The research on digital formative assessment in Europe is still limited. On the other hand, there are many good small-scale studies featuring different approaches to using digital tools to support formative assessment from Taiwan, and to a lesser extent, the United States. These different studies illustrate possibilities for integrating digital tools to support learning aims.

The studies featured in the review also underline the importance of teacher competences



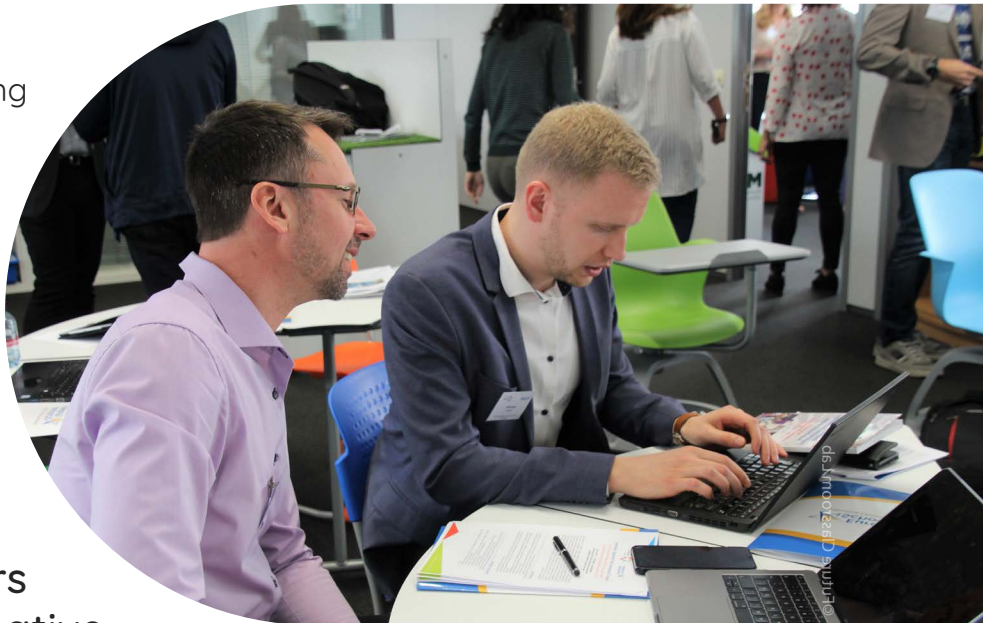
Janet Looney is the director of the European Institute of Education and Social Policy based in Paris, and Joint Editor of the European Journal of Education.

to use and adapt commercial-off-the-shelf technologies to support specific learning and assessment aims. Appropriate opportunities for teacher education and training, access to technical support, affordability of digital devices and content, and other challenges also need to be addressed.

The A@L project suggests that many teachers know well about formative assessment and digital tools, but they do not use formative assessment or digital assessment often in their classroom. What kind of obstacles are there?

There may be various reasons teachers are not creating opportunities for formative assessment lesson plans, or not taking advantage of the digital tools:

- » A lack of attention to formative assessment concepts and methods in initial teacher education or continuing professional development. Similarly, a lack of attention to how different digital tools may support effective formative assessment may also be a factor.
- » While teachers say they are very familiar with formative assessment, they may not seek or receive feedback on whether and how they are integrating it in their practices. Teaching peers, supervisors, and students can share what's working well and where the teachers' practices may be strengthened.
- » Effective formative assessment and DFA may require changes in teachers' mindsets and practices. This kind of significant change requires support. Teachers also need to be able to find which practices work best for them, and to build their expertise with new methods over time.
- » In the aftermath of school closures and remote learning during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers may want to avoid digital tools. Greater attention to how to balance face-to-face and digital interactions may be needed. This may have been a factor given the timing of the A@L study.



What would you recommend policy makers in supporting digital formative assessment?

A non-exhaustive set of policy recommendations might include the following:

- » Communicating the value of whole-school approaches to leading change. Ensuring that school leaders and teachers have the autonomy they need to integrate (D)FA is also important.
- » Promoting the use of diagnostic tools such as the European [SELFIE for schools](#), and the [SELFIE for teachers](#), which may be used to identify areas for improvement in the use of digital technologies, including for DFA.
- » Communicating the value of formative assessment for identifying and responding to

student needs, which is particularly important given learning losses experienced during the height of the pandemic.

- » Ensuring that schools have pedagogical resources and expert support on new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Universities, education ministries, teacher networks, education consultants or specialist organisations, in line with their own specific roles and capacities, can each offer support to schools and teachers as they integrate new approaches and develop new materials.
- » Supporting opportunities for teacher capacity building through continuing professional development, school networks and professional learning communities. Both in-person and online opportunities may be effective. Opportunities to develop action research on effective DFA, including through collaboration with university researchers are important.
- » Giving students and teachers opportunities to share their experiences with DFA, and what they have found works well can provide important insights on implementation as well as on effectiveness of different approaches at classroom level.
- » Providing sufficient resources and reviewing procurement policies to ensure that schools are able to acquire and maintain appropriate ICT.
- » Ensuring that quality assurance processes and teacher appraisals highlight the value of formative assessment.
- » Supporting research and development of effective formative assessment and DFA.

What do you think future projects and research studies should investigate regarding DFA?

It would be helpful to supplement the A@L project with some more in-depth studies of how schools and teachers have successfully integrated effective DFA into their practices. What were the challenges they faced? What kind of initial and continuing teacher education was most helpful? What kind of school level support did they benefit from? Were additional resources provided? Perhaps most importantly, whether and how teachers have changed mindsets on the value of formative assessment and DFA, and what kind of support they have had to integrate new assessment practices. The viewpoints of school leaders, teachers, students and their parents are all important to developing insight on what has worked in successful schools.

Opportunities for peer learning among policy makers, teachers, teacher educators are also useful. While every context is different – from policy- to classroom-levels – others may learn from experiences of their peers. Peer learning is also useful for prompting self-reflection.



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